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SUBJECT: HONG KONG GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO TIP RANKING
DOWNGRADE

REF: SECSTATE 60446

¶1. (SBU) Per reftel instructions, Post met with Principal Assistant Secretary for Security W.H. Chow June 16 to inform him of Hong Kong's TIP ranking downgrade and provide a preview of Hong Kong's narrative in the 2009 Trafficking in Persons report.

¶2. (SBU) Principal Assistant Secretary Chow was dismayed to learn that Hong Kong has been downgraded from Tier 1 to Tier 2 in this year's TIP report. After completing a line-by-line comparison of this year's narrative with last year's text, Chow argued the language on Hong Kong's lack of trafficking investigations and prosecutions was "misleading." He noted the language could be misinterpreted to imply the Hong Kong government did nothing when potential trafficking cases are brought to its attention. Chow insisted that is not the case at all. The truth, Chow explained, is that Hong Kong law enforcement "rigorously" follows up on all investigate leads, but there simply has been very little evidence of human trafficking in Hong Kong. Chow also emphasized that Hong Kong law enforcement cannot pursue trafficking cases if foreign consulates do not inform Hong Kong authorities of incidents where their nationals are victims of trafficking, a reference to the report's mention of seven trafficking victims assisted by a foreign consulate.

¶3. (SBU) Poloff restated the USG's concern that the Hong Kong government may be failing to proactively identify trafficking victims amongst the large, and continuously growing, number of foreign domestic helpers and prostitutes working in Hong Kong. Noting that the fight against human trafficking requires the efforts of all sectors of society, Poloff encouraged the Hong Kong government to enhance engagement with NGOs, foreign consulates, local businesses, and other stakeholders in its overall anti-TIP efforts.

¶4. (SBU) After stating his government is not "comfortable" with a Tier 2 ranking, Chow stressed that Hong Kong wants to return to a Tier 1 ranking and asked what specific measures need to be undertaken to achieve that goal. Poloff elaborated on the four recommendations included in the report, with Chow taking detailed notes during the discussion. Poloff stressed the USG's commitment to partnering with the Hong Kong government in addressing all aspects of the trafficking issue, to include arranging relevant USG training and helping identify available materials that can be incorporated into public awareness campaigns. Chow said his government welcomes new opportunities to work with the USG on TIP.

¶5. (SBU) Chow concluded the meeting by reiterating his government's commitment to eradicating human trafficking. He said even if Hong Kong had remained in Tier 1, the Hong Kong government is always looking for ways "to do better." Chow told us his department has yet to decide whether to issue a formal press release responding to the report or just have remarks on hand for media inquires. Either way, their

primary message is to reassure the Hong Kong public that the government continues to take human trafficking very seriously and encourage Hong Kong citizens to report suspected trafficking crimes. Poloff expressed the USG's appreciation for Hong Kong government's responsiveness and willingness to help us better understand Hong Kong's TIP situation, and said we look forward to continuing our excellent working relationship.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: This year's TIP report clearly has gotten the Hong Kong government's attention, and Post expects increased opportunities to engage with Hong Kong counterparts on TIP issues in this reporting year. Post welcomes G/TIP's involvement in reaching out to the Hong Kong government, and recommends that G/TIP visits to Post take place earlier in the information-gathering phase to allow adequate time to address problem areas that may surface. End comment.
MARUT